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Third Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
New York, 14-18 July 2008

Letter dated 3 March 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to write to you in reference to General Assembly resolution 62/47, by which Member States agreed to convene the third Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects from 14 to 18 July 2008 in New York. Attached is a letter from Dalius Čekuolis, Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations, which he addressed in his capacity as Chairman-designate of the biennial meeting to all Member States in order to facilitate preparations for the meeting (see annex). I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Meeting.

(*Signed*) Raimonda **Murmokaite**
Minister Plenipotentiary
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 3 March 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chairman-designate of the third Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, to be convened from 14 to 18 July 2008 in New York. Having held over the past nine weeks extensive open-ended informal consultations in New York and Geneva and numerous bilateral meetings and consultations with States and civil society, I wish to share with you my sense of what receives very broad support.

I am encouraged that States confirmed their strong desire to follow the mandate given in General Assembly resolution 62/47 and focus on consideration of the implementation of the Programme of Action and on identifying priority issues and implementation challenges and opportunities.

Most intervening States expressed the belief that they had to adopt a fresh approach to the third Biennial Meeting, if it was to be effective and to deliver results. Most of the States wished for the Meeting to produce a concrete outcome, be it a document, conclusions or recommendations. This broad convergence of views compels me to work closely with the Bureau-designate to develop an appropriate structure that would be conducive to a results-oriented Meeting.

Given the very limited amount of time available to us at the Meeting itself, States generally proposed an in-depth discussion of a limited number of issues.

A number of topics for the third Biennial Meeting were referred to in the thematic debates of the First Committee in 2007. My consultations simply corroborated the broadest support for three themes: (a) international cooperation and assistance and national capacity-building; (b) illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons; and (c) stockpile management and surplus disposal.

The fourth major theme has already been put on our agenda, in accordance with resolution 61/66: the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (hereinafter referred to as the international tracing instrument).

Some States, in addition, pointed out that the Meeting should offer an opportunity for addressing other issues pertaining to the illicit small arms trade in all its aspects. In operative paragraph 8 of resolution 62/47, the General Assembly also called upon States, in considering the implementation of the Programme of Action, to identify priority issues or topics of relevance in the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and to highlight their implementation challenges and opportunities. It was generally agreed to address those challenges and opportunities in order to be in a better position to improve and strengthen implementation of the Programme of Action in the future.

These five large building blocks, in addition to one segment of the Meeting devoted to regional and international organizations and non-governmental organizations and civil society, would provide a basis for in-depth and focused discussions and would constitute the backbone of the Meeting.

Having weighted the importance of topics, the Bureau-designate supported my intention to tentatively allocate four plenary meetings to the three consensus-building themes, including two plenary meetings to consideration of the international tracing instrument; one plenary meeting for other complementary issues and to identifying other priority issues or topics of relevance and to highlighting their implementation challenges and opportunities; and one plenary meeting to regional and international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

In terms of structuring the Meeting, the discussion of the three consensus-building themes would begin immediately after taking the necessary organizational decisions on Monday morning, 14 July. Allocation of time among the clusters will require further consultations. At the morning session of Wednesday, 16 July, States would have an opportunity to consider other complementary issues and the implementation agenda of the Programme of Action, as provided for in operative paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 62/47. The afternoon plenary meeting of Wednesday, 16 July, would be reserved for statements by intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. Two plenary meetings on Thursday, 17 July, would be earmarked for the consideration of the international tracing instrument. Two plenary meetings on Friday, 18 July, would be devoted to the consideration and adoption of the substantive report of the Meeting.

Efficient time management of the Meeting will be crucial to its success. In that context, I am satisfied that States preferred to do away with a general exchange of views. I encourage national interventions on specific themes to be made available in writing; these will be promptly posted on the website of the Meeting and will be accessible for all.

Plenary meetings will start on time, at 10 a.m. and at 3 p.m.

I wish to highlight three critical aspects of the third Biennial Meeting. First, the Meeting will consider the status of implementation of the Programme of Action to identify the challenges and opportunities as well as to exchange views and lessons learned. Since the adoption of the Programme of Action in 2001, many experiences have been accumulated at the national, regional and international levels. The discussion of best practices, successes and even setback stories would be valuable.

Second, the Meeting must fulfil the role of a global forum for matching needs with resources. Thus, international assistance and cooperation will be considered both as a stand-alone theme and a cross-cutting issue with relevance to all the themes we discuss. I strongly encourage States to bring concrete project proposals to the Meeting, which not only can be discussed but which can also be fed into an Office for Disarmament Affairs database to be launched at the Meeting.

This leads me to the third issue of refining the processes of implementation of the Programme of Action: how to improve the small arms process on assistance and cooperation in order to render it more effective. Delivering and planning assistance involves time, capacity and a process. I am counting on the Office for Disarmament Affairs for further input on this subject in the run-up to the Meeting. The Geneva process working group on needs and resources will also provide its contribution.

The effectiveness and results orientation of the Meeting will benefit from advance preparation. For this purpose, I have appointed a number of facilitators who

will help to build consensus around key issues where concrete outcomes may be expected. The delegation of Egypt has agreed to facilitate the preparation for the consideration of the international tracing instrument. The preparation for consideration of the theme of international cooperation and assistance and national capacity-building will be facilitated by Colombia. The theme of the illicit brokering in small arms and light weapons will be facilitated by the Republic of Korea. The theme of stockpile management and surplus disposal will be facilitated by Switzerland.

In terms of the organization of the Meeting, I propose the use of the same rules of procedure (see A/CONF.192/L.1) that have been used at all previous conferences in the framework of the Programme of Action, mutatis mutandis. States shared my suggestion that the third Biennial Meeting should not have a high-level segment and that it should be a working-level exercise. I will ask the Secretariat to issue the list of participants of the Meeting as early as Monday, 14 July, in order to facilitate contacts between various donor and assistance-seeking States. As in the past, I would encourage States to include non-governmental organizations and other civil society representatives in their delegations. Active participation by relevant non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors will bring practical expertise and experience, as in fact recognized in the Programme of Action.

In resolution 62/47, the General Assembly has made for the first time a strong link between reporting and international assistance and cooperation. National reporting is obviously the key to assessing the implementation of the Programme of Action and to identifying areas where national efforts are lagging. This year, national reports are expected to contain for the first time information on the international tracing instrument and illicit brokering.

On 28 January 2008, the Office for Disarmament Affairs sent out a note verbale, encouraging States to submit their integrated national reports by 31 March 2008. Without a timely submission by your State, neither I, nor facilitators, nor other States will be able meaningfully to analyse and recommend actions for a stronger implementation of the Programme of Action. We have to aim at submitting no fewer reports than were submitted in 2005. I ask you to get in touch with me or the Office for Disarmament Affairs if you need assistance, guidance or advice in preparing the report.

I draw your attention to a reporting assistance package, developed by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research in collaboration with the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and the small arms survey, to assist States in reporting on their implementation of the Programme of Action (including guidelines for reporting on the international tracing instrument). It is available online (see the Office for Disarmament Affairs website at http://disarmament.un.org/cab/thirdBMS.html). Should States require further assistance, they can call Gillian Goh (tel: 1 917 367 2904; e-mail: gohg@un.org).

The language of General Assembly resolution 62/47 and the wish of many States to have a results-oriented meeting imply that the third Biennial Meeting should have a concrete outcome. Of course, the Meeting will not and cannot be a review conference. This means the Meeting will not decide on institutional changes; however, it can recommend improvements and set goals. In my consultations, most intervening delegations stressed the need for the Meeting to produce a concrete

outcome. Nobody objected to this idea and therefore we will work towards such an outcome.

I wish to express my appreciation to every regional group for nominating Bureau members. In maintaining transparency and inclusiveness, it is my intention to work very closely with the Bureau-designate in managing the proceedings of the third Biennial Meeting, including preparation for substantive discussions and negotiation of a possible outcome. I am pleased to report to you that, in addition to myself, the Bureau will consist of the representatives of Bulgaria, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Finland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Liberia, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland and Trinidad and Tobago.

I will continue further consultations with States, regional and international organizations and other stakeholders. I plan to attend some regional events and conferences. I will conduct a further round of informal open-ended consultations in New York and Geneva in April. By that time we expect to have received the national reports and to have put together a realistic but results-oriented structure around the backbone of the Meeting. I look forward to constructive and practical cooperation with your delegation.

(*Signed*) Dalius **Čekuolis**